

THE MULTIPLE NARRATIVE TRADITIONS IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Native American literature rooted in the Native soil gave birth to authentic Native American experiences further comprising of travel accounts, protest literature, autobiographies, sermons, and tribal histories that help in a better communication of Native American experiences in the midst of dislocation, suppression, death, false treaties, alcoholism, and rejection by the mainstream American society. As a means of perpetuation of the different nuances of oral narratives, contemporary Native American writers have employed different narrative techniques to bring the oral experience alive, to make their work meaningful and relevant among the Native American community and larger. The ability of narrative to verbalize and situate experience as text provides a resource for the display of self and identity. This paper explores the varied narrative strategies that Native American writers have employed in their text. It studies how these diverse narrative structures and styles have been shaped and influenced by the distinguishing features of Native American identity.

KEYWORDS: Narrative Techniques, Native American Identity, Experience, Text & Oral

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INTRODUCTION

Native American narrative, an art inherent to their culture, is privileged by many writers. In the words of Craig Womack,

Tribal literatures are the tree, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of the American literatures. We are the canon... Without Native American literature, there is no American canon... Let Americanists struggle for their place in the canon. (Womack 6-7)

Indigenous writers become storytellers and whether they write in a foreign or native tongue, they transmit ancient mythologies, worldviews, culture, migration, and settlement histories employing different narrative forms and techniques that best emphasize the authenticity of their experience. Because of these diverse forms and a worldview that requires a comprehensive study, Penelope Myrtle Kelsey has devised certain means to read native texts in a culturally appropriate way, to achieve an exploration of the delineations, and key cultural concepts that has hitherto remained obscure. She affirms,

...by centering readings in tribal experience and lifeways a theoretical gloss is achieved that is organic to Native writing: Native writers continually invoke these epistemes with a host of strategies, and that knowledge base is therefore organic to these indigenous texts. (Kelsey 8-9)

We live in a complex world today where conversations and business communications take place fundamentally through the virtual world. Communities and societies of people with similar history, interests,

culture, values, and ethics in this globalized world have largely been replaced by individuals immersed in their own complex makeup all fighting to be heard, yet having no time to listen. Technology has reduced humans to impassive beings. The world has become smaller; recent developments in connectivity have made it possible to travel the globe within closed doors. Man being the subject of his own study becomes a narcissist and to a large extent has lost interest in fulfilling the demands of the society or community of the real world as long as he has the means to live by his own standards. People in general no longer have time to trace their genealogy because they are too busy building a future in virtual spaces, in virtual environments with virtual people and would expend and consume large sums of money to upgrade them. More people today have become socially awkward, self-imposing social isolation to replace their unhappy social reality with a more satisfying and happy virtual one they have designed for themselves.

The growing egotistic desire of man undeniably brings back the history of the West wanting to trade and consume more, claiming territories and riches that belong to others. Since then histories have been interrupted, cultures been replaced, values been bartered, names been substituted, and people been dislocated from their own lands. It is disheartening to say the least, to see all these reflected in the writings of the first Europeans who had the power and privilege of using the pen to manipulate the minds of future generations. The rigid dichotomy that is still maintained between things related to the East and West undeniably mirror the conviction of the West being the ultimate power and the standard with which everything else needs to be measured. The general attitude of the West towards all things related to East, or anything outside the boundary of its safe haven reflects the European awareness of being in a privileged position to perceive the world's racial and cultural diversity.

The early American writings from the European explorers are primarily in the form of narratives and letters. These accounts were often lop-sided or asymmetrical because it denied any history or ethnic existence before the European arrival. What is therefore intriguing is how narrative of indigenous populations was being suppressed by the more powerful narratives of the European colonizers for centuries. These narratives that were often authoritative and influential seemed to have prejudiced the rationale of man that a challenge against this notion has not been made until recently by writers who have to fight to make their voice heard. Today scholars and critics alike are responding to the complexities of narrative, juggling the meaning and function, contesting the validity of man as a narrator, questioning and studying its impact and influence, and more importantly analyzing its inherent relation with history, science, and other fields of study.

Extensive Native American writing started in the nineteenth century as Native Americans themselves felt obligated to rewrite history and question the accounts already made by the Europeans with reference to their history, culture, and identity. It encompasses the orally transmitted myths, legends, tales, and lyrics of Native American cultures. Reviving a history and culture that has been misrepresented and subdued by other powerful nations, Native American writings emerge despite having to thrive in a hostile and challenging environment. Voices that had been suppressed and stifled for centuries took to writing and creating literature hoping to educate non-natives about Native American religions, culture, history, and beliefs, and most importantly to exercise their rights as self-governing human beings.

As much as the dominant White culture attempted to erase native cultures that existed before the coming of Christopher Columbus to the extent of a few writers pronouncing the end of Native Americans in America and reducing them to the term, "disappearing Indians," Native cultures and literature continue flourish among the bristly environment of contemporary cultures, ethics, and literature.

Storytelling was one common feature that was shared by numerous Native American tribes before there was any form of writing system. Literature was shared by way of the voice accompanied by performance. Stories, songs, and poems grew out of myths that have been created and recreated by thousands of members of societies down through many generations. These stories were collectively owned by the society, marked by anonymous authorship, and the absence of a solitary author. It was a verbal art that breached speech, chant, and song.

There was a dynamic relationship between conservation (preserving the basic elements of a story) on the one hand and innovation or improvisation (the enhancement brought to a given work by generations of story teller performers) on the other. Indeed it was innovation that made the role of the individual very highly regarded. Performers used inflection, variation of story elements, gesture, silences, and so forth to make old stories new. (Wolff np)

Additionally, Native American literature is complicated in its own contexts, as there is a tension between expression of Native American by non-Natives and the history of representational encounters by Native American themselves within public consciousness. Louis Owens explains,

For American Indians, the problem of identity comprehends centuries of colonial and postcolonial displacement, often brutally enforced peripherality, cultural denigration - including especially as harsh privileging of English of tribal languages – and systematic oppression by the monocentric “westerling” impulse in America. (Owens 4)

The first Native American works written in European languages were transcribed speeches and treaties with European colonists that date to the 1600s and 1700s. A Timucua chief, in 1539, upon his encounter of Juan Ponce de Leon, a man who “discovered” Florida uttered these words:

Others of your accursed race have, in years past, poisoned our peaceful shores. They have taught me what you are. What is your employment? To wander about like vagabonds from land to land, to rob the poor, to betray the confiding, to murder in cold blood the defenseless No! With such a person I want no peace- no friendship. War, never-ending war, exterminating war, is all the boon I ask. (Blaisdell 3)

Another account of betrayal can be seen from the narrative of a Native American Chief in the event of Buffalo Creek Council where Red Jacket responded to the request of a land speculator named Mr. Richardson:

Brother! The White people buy and sell false rights to our lands, and your employers have, you say paid a great price for their rights... The loss of it will not hurt them, but our lands are of great value to us, and we wish you to go back to your employers, and tell them and the Yorkers that they have no right to buy and sell false rights to our lands. (47)

The history of broken treaties becomes an indispensable framework and context for reading Native American literature today as Native Americans continue to view this as an evidence of U.S. hypocrisy and racism. During the American Revolution in 1778, what was known to be the first treaty was signed between the U.S. Government and the Delaware. The Delaware signed eighteen treaties that essentially took their land and relocated tribal members from the Eastern seaboard to Canada and Oklahoma. Likewise, several different tribes signed treaties which resulted in a tragic loss of their native lands. Another representative of such malfeasance in U.S. history was the infamous Trail of Tears, the forced relocation during the 1830s. Estimates based on tribal and military records suggest that approximately 100,000 indigenous people were forced from their homes during that period, which is sometimes known as the Removal Era, and

that some 15,000 died during the journey west. The term “Trail of Tears” invokes the collective suffering those people experienced. The atrocities of nineteenth century U.S. history inform native thought of the past and present. Such atrocities represent important historical touchstones, and many are reconstructed in fiction and poetry by Native writers.

Lucy Tapahonso, is a Navajo poet who was herself reared in Navajo reservation. She takes elements of landscape, history, and humour and reflects how her identity as a Native American shapes and influences her works. In her poem “In 1864”, she recounts Navajo removal, also called the Long Walk, an event central to Dine history. Tapahonso prefaces her poem, “In 1864” with a factual account of the event,

In 1864, 8,354 Navajos were forced to walk from Dinétah to Bosque Redondo in southern New Mexico, a distance of three hundred miles. They were held for four years until the U.S Government declared the assimilation attempt a failure. More than 2,500 died of smallpox and other illnesses, depression, severe weather conditions, and starvation. The survivors returned to Dinétah in June of 1868. (Tapahonso np)

Tapahonso’s poems not only document the atrocity and memorialize the dead, but it also asserts the timeless beauty of the Dine and their continuing cultural traditions. A heart wrenching story of “The Long Walk” that killed thousands of innocent Navajos who were forced to leave their home, is powerfully expressed through her narrative. Keeping the tradition of storytelling intact, she expresses how, for the Native Americans these stories remind them of their roots, and the strength of the forefathers to resist and survive such atrocities. She writes in her poem:

After we stopped for a Coke and chips, the storytelling resumed,

My aunt always started the story saying, ‘You are here because of what happened to your great-grandmother long ago’. (Tapahonso np)

Tapahonso’s poems serve as a fine example of how Native American heritage and history shapes the narrative technique of contemporary writers who incorporates the art of storytelling in poetry. This offers a prospect for history and ancient beliefs to be preserved, while educating and reminding others of the very seeds of America's first people and providing insight into their history and rich heritage.

Many Native American writers like Tapahonso, construct narratives that not only portray the brutal reality of American history but also highlight the strength and resilience of tribal peoples past and present. The Native American oral literature includes many literary forms, and of these forms, songs and stories remain popular and are given reverence. Oral literature continues to be at the center of Native American life and culture playing a crucial role in defining what it means to be a member of a given tribe and how a person relates to the tribe’s past, present, and future. Although the details of the stories found in different tribes may differ, the tales often have similar themes. One common theme is the creation of the world and another is the theme of a people’s origins and migrations.

According to Native American mythologies, the past begins in the Origin Period. William Fenon, a prominent Iroquoianist adopted an approach for interpreting the Iroquois Earth-Diver story. According to him, myth affirms that culture is an affair of the mind. ‘The Earth is our mother, living and continually generating life. Life is regular, cyclical, patterned by twos and fours, and these metaphysical patterns are models for ethical ones’. (Wiget 9) Accounts of migrations and ancestors abound, as do vision or healing songs and tricksters’ tales. Among many descriptions of the trickster, the most concise and at the same time the most complete one might be the one by Paul Radin who advanced a Jungian interpretation of the Trickster as an image of man’s psychic evolution:

... from an undefined being to one with the physiognomy of man, from being a physically underdeveloped and prey to his instincts, to an individual who is at least conscious of what he does and attempts to become socialized. (Radin 136)

Native American literature abounds in trickster stories or short narratives that use animal characters. Tricksters are often seen to embody human features to deliver folk wisdom and to help us question and comprehend human nature and human behaviour having different ways to portray human strengths and weaknesses. In the Native American oral tradition, the unrefined but sacred Trickster assumes many forms. He can be Old-Man Coyote in the far east, Raven in the Northwest and Arctic, Hare in the East Wolverine in the North Woods and Spider or Old man in the Plains, to mention just a few of his manifestations. Sometimes the trickster appears as human, sometimes as animals. The "trickster" plays tricks and is the victim of tricks. The trickery of such stories extends as well to symbolic play regarding cultural forms, rules, and worldview.

Alice Beaulieu, my grandmother, told me that my father was a tribal trickster with words and memories; a compassionate trickster who did not heed the sinister stories about stolen souls and evil gambler... Naanabozho was the first tribal trickster on the earth. He was comic, a part of the natural world, a spiritual balance in a comic drama; and so he must continue in his stories. (Vizenor 69)

These mythic figures often play an important role in building and transforming a culture. They act as a network of pathways between the individual and the community, nature and culture, landscape and narrative art, and thereby accomplishing the purpose of enlightening. This is why these characters have a high chance of appearing in cases when the values of a culture are threatened in some way.

From oral narratives that recount personal experiences to the diversity of contemporary literary techniques, Native writers remain rooted through the narrative structures they employ, allowing the narrative to reflect their sense of place and identity. Leslie Marmon Silko draws on tribal stories, from chant-ways to Navajo paintings and myths, local traditions of gossip and storytelling, her narrative structure, religious, and cultural worldview is often indiscernible to people outside the Native American community, or more specifically from the traditional White critical perspective. Silko is a mixed blood writer and for this reason critics often classify her narratives as mixed blood narratives that draw inspiration from modernist texts at the same time always keeping her Native identity intact.

Tayo, the protagonist in Silko's *Ceremony* is a mixed blood who undertakes a challenging journey of self-realization. Being alienated from his native culture, and constantly shifting between borders, Tayo longs for a personal identity. For the Native Americans, maintaining a pure lineage is honourable as they consider it a means of preserving culture. As a Native American, Tayo is marginalized by the hegemonic White, and as a Mexican, more so by the Native Americans. It requires courage and strength for Tayo to encounter this challenging journey and emerge as a strong individual in order to revitalize his Native American roots.

The terms fullblood, mixed blood, traditional, and progressive are often used as absolute terms, in that fullbloods are seen as being traditional and mixed bloods are viewed as assimilated and acculturated. Such absolutes are rarely accurate. (Justice XV)

Silko in this novel takes a non-sequential approach to both time and events weaving together two main narratives-Tayo's story after his return from World War Two with a series of traditional Laguna Native American chants emphasizing

how two separate narrative strands assist to balance one another. Following her own pattern, Silko subverts the rigid structure of the linear narrative, for instance Aristotle's definition of a plot that follows a rigid form of beginning, middle, and an end. Silko jumps around through time and narrative voice, following a non-rigid narrative structure and using flashbacks that narrate Tayo's war experiences and events that happened before the war.

Jaishree Odin states, 'Silko . . . uses fragmentation and discontinuity in her texts to get the reader intimately involved in the reading of the text, the reader creates her own narrative as she traces her path through the fragmented textual landscape which seems to spill in multiple directions' (Odin 3). Silko intentionally uses cultural distinct forms of narrative interweaving portions of Laguna Pueblo Chants and stories to construct Tayo's story to parallel it. Through this distinct narrative structure, Silko made it a point that the author's narrative does not subvert the narrative of Tayo, nor the traditional or ancient narrative structure of his community. The rediscovery of the self for Tayo comes when he was able to see the significance of the past, how the worlds of stories, of Pueblo mythology, rituals, and ceremonies provide meaning to his present. In this way, one learns to view oneself and one's tradition so as to approach both rightly. For Native Americans, the gift of all creatures to share and participate in the process of ongoing creation makes all things sacred and whole. Old stories push new stories forward and as such myths and rituals evolve to meet the circumstances of the present. Consequently, familiar and non-familiar literary forms and narrative techniques are intertwined, requiring readers to have awareness and understanding about Native American culture, geography, and history to wholly comprehend tribal and mixed blood cultural and political concerns.

As a means of perpetuation of the different nuances of oral narratives, contemporary Native American writers have employed different narrative techniques to bring the oral experience alive, to make their work meaningful and relevant among the Native American community and larger. An extensive study of Mayan bookmarking and epistemic record for example, helps in a better and more fruitful understanding of Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) by situating *Almanac* within that tribal literary inheritance. A criticism of Silko's novel therefore requires a tribally grounded criticism in order to bring to the surface the true meaning inherited in the novel. In defining and studying Native American literature, Kelsey affirms the importance of practicing tribal theory so that the tribal foundation of the text will emerge and motivate our theoretical praxis.

In *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature* (2008), she addresses how one can use tribal knowledge as theoretical framework for reading and understanding Native American texts. In her consideration of Marie McLaughlin's *Myths and Legends of the Sioux* (1916), a collection of Dakota legends that McLaughlin illustrates with a series of pictographic drawings by Devils Lake and Standing Rock Sioux artists, she argues that by considering the role of pictography among the Dakota and the cultural values that its practice embodies, pictography may be used as a theoretical frame for understanding McLaughlin's writings. The inclusion of pictographic illustrations in McLaughlin's writings challenges her reader's understanding of Native people. Kelsey's argument can be approved from the analysis that these pictographic drawings are the equivalent of Dakota writing and for that reason they should be understood as an assertion of Dakota equality and civilization. In this manner, McLaughlin can be honoured as a preserver of Dakota culture as she fulfils the role of women as culture bearers and the primary figures for imparting Dakota values by defending Dakota knowledge and the lifeways they inform. The pictographs that are included such as "The Pet Donkey," "The White Buffalo Woman," "The Mysterious Butte", and so on are all significant because of their centrality to the Dakota culture and their concerns with identity, nation and the importance of seeking one's own values and not of an external order. They are

defined as, 'stories from the elders that teach about the past and often involve things of a mysterious nature, not easily explainable' (Kelsey 33). Expressing her own feelings about the importance and significance of pictographs, Kelsey maintains that the critical pictographic records can function as a theoretical framework to unpack the Dakota worldview that McLaughlin affirms in these stories. 'Pictographs record and express Dakota knowledges, history and literature...form the underlayer that culture rests upon' (28). Like McLaughlin, Charles Eastman's text *Indian Boyhood* (2008), uses an educational dialogue about the "language of feathers." Just as pictographs serve as an expression of Dakota experiences, culture and literature, the significance of feathers is affirmed in studying the Dakota cultural identity. 'Feathers represented a material cultural expression of autobiography for Dakota men as they communicated nonverbally a man's history and accomplishments as a warrior'. (53) Eastman uses Native knowledge as a methodology for defending the interests of the Native people. He has tribal-centered agendas in terms of asserting indigenous equality and Dakota nationhood in the face of assimilation. Without overtly arguing for Native American superiority, Eastman uses the autobiographical genre which includes a range of tribal genres along with anthropological discourse using the ethnographic mode. In his use of indigenous knowledge, he attempts to affirm that the Native American way was better and that this kind of narrative helps him refigure Dakota culture and experience. While many critics fail to see the significance of these narratives, these forms of narration establish continuity between a writer's childhood cultural identity and the identity the writer cultivates through narrative. Many Native American writers have thus emphasized on how these tribal-centric narratives help them accomplish a defeat of the stereotypes of Native American life ways through a reflection of the complexity of their cultural position.

In her analysis of the multiple representations of Native American identity taken from colonial Euro-American narratives, Mary A. McCay declares the significant alterations and misinterpretations that govern these narratives thereby concluding that Euro-American cultural narratives are 'hierarchical and monolithic' often excluding multicultural dimensions. In McCay's view, Native American writers Leslie Marmon Silko deploy Native American myths and points of view in order to re-constitute and revitalize Native American cultural traditions and identity-formations, suppressed by, or eliminated from, the Euro-American-centered narratives of North American history (Balogh 152-153).

The superficiality of the general comprehension of the Native Americans shaped the ways Native Americans have been represented in movies and books. Hollywood movies till date have infamously popularized the image of a romanticized warrior chief, adorned in costumes and armed with weapons rather looking savage and brutal. Another popular image is the Native American as the orator and the treaty maker of history texts, the subject of the case study or documentary, the creator of pottery displayed in museums. These fabricated images are somewhat always exotic, sometimes fearsome, and greatly fragmentary. They are misrepresentations that have severely distorted the formation of young Native Americans' identity. Native American writers and film makers began to respond to these images by putting whites in their lenses, restructuring the established narratives and representing their own lives and images.

Sherman Alexie, a Native American writer and film maker for instance decenters mainstream culture by privileging Native oral tradition correcting stereotypes about Native people and their culture inspired by the authenticity of his experiences. Privileging the spoken word over the written, he is aware of the importance of tradition. He therefore uses orality as a tool to critique dominant discourse, which heavily relies on the written word. He patterns his characters as good storytellers, to 'intervene... in and rewrite... the narratives of conquest by inserting Native American voices into the storytelling' (Cox 225). Alexie wrote and coproduced a film entitled *Smoke Signals* (1998) where the main characters,

Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, take a trip from the Spokane Reservation to Phoenix, Arizona to recover the ashes of Victor's father, who has died in an accidental fire. When Victor at one point asked Thomas to look like a mean, stoic warrior... 'to look like you just got back from killing buffalo' (232), Thomas protests, 'But our tribe never hunted buffalo. We were fishermen' (32). Through this conversation between two characters Alexie mocks the unrealistic and romanticized images of Native Americans as savage warriors, in the meantime stating how these images influence the self-representation and identity construction of individual Native Americans (233).

Contemporary Native American writers therefore are left with the task of restructuring and correcting the false comprehensions of white ideals and stereotypes. Because a majority of the early life stories of Native people were solicited, collected, edited, and translated by Euro-American traders, missionaries, military officials, and travelers later followed by ethnologists and anthropologists, a significant collection of Native American self-narrations are collaboratively authored (Porter and Roemer 133). This has led scholars to conclude that one of the most dominant features of this period is characterized by 'bicultural composite composition', a collaboration of the narrator and recorder/editor (Krupat 5).

Factual experiences are molded by time within the framework of the present, bridging the gap between the old and the new, and effectively expressing the lives of people and world-view that would rather be inaccessible. As a genre, the autobiography or personal narrative is shaped by narrative events providing a means of approaching both the oral and the written process of creation and transmission in Native American literature. It is a reaction and product of the imagination or an act of remembering. Because these narratives incorporate other literary forms such as songs, tales, origin stories, and dream visions, Native American autobiography serves both as personal and cultural narrative providing an opportunity to study forms, functions, stylistic devices, and techniques characteristic of Native American literature. These life writings have a significant feature of recognizable Native voice in the work as they center on personal experiences but at the same time participate in family history and in the events of the tribe. As the Native American identity is shaped by the larger community and the interaction and understanding of all things living, autobiographies also adopt the trait of being retrospective rather than introspective. These personal memories of the narrators remain clearly within the framework and perspective of tribal history and culture. Personal narrations although often isolated from the community or society in the White ideal, Native American autobiography are rather focused on the characterization and the relationship of protagonist to the community and the land.

H. David Brumble III delineates six fairly distinct kinds of preliterate autobiographical narratives- narratives that do not conform to Euro-American notions about autobiography that emphasize autonomous individuality and writing. (Porter and Roemer 127) These preliterate autobiographical forms include coup tales, informal autobiographical tales, self-examinations, self-vindications, educational narratives, and stories of quests for visions and power. The earliest written autobiography is still thought to be the 1768 execution sermon of Samson Occum (Mohegan) later published in 1982. William Apess's (Pequot) *Son of the Forest* (1829) is hailed as the second Native American autobiography. Both Methodist ministers, Apess and Copway used narrative structures adapted from Christian conversion narratives and focused on spiritual confessions and testimonials (133). Native American autobiographies have a special feature of an interweaving of myth, history and contemporary incidents as well as an interweaving of personal experience with tribal history and culture. The self-narrations emphasize a communal and relational self, and they may be spoken, performed, painted, or crafted, rather than written.

Contemporary Native American autobiography evolved with a key focus of defining Native American identity and self-identification. Reformulating indigenous cultures and languages alongside deconstructing the subject and the complexities of contemporary Native identities, these autobiographies narrate histories and personal stories that have been suppressed, at the same time aiming to reveal key changes in practices of self-narration that reflect historical transitions. From dreams fashioned in pictographs, to performance, symbols, crafts, and paintings, contemporary Native autobiographers interweave their personal stories with cultural myths and histories, emphasizing a specific subjectivity and the continuation of oral traditions. Autobiographies bear witness not only to a history of genocide, but to survival and the continuance and the possibility of healing from the wounds of history. Anita Endrezze's autobiography *Throwing Fire at the Sun, Water at the Moon* (2000) use numerous narrative techniques and forms unique to Native American tradition—combining first-person narratives, poetry, letters, short fiction, historical retelling, myths, and paintings. In the service of self-narration, she retells not only family history but the history of her people, the Yaqui tribe. Endrezze recounts Yaqui creation myths, illuminating parallels and differences between Christian and Yaqui narratives. This distinction gathers significance as she explores Spanish and Mexican attempts to subvert and annihilate Yaqui culture through religious and political pressure. The characteristic feature of Native American autobiography has always been an interweaving of personal stories with cultural myths and histories accentuating an unambiguous subjectivity and the survival of oral cultures.

CONCLUSIONS

An extensive study of Native American oral narratives shows that narrative was not just a form of art with respect to an utterance or word; it was intricately linked to performance. Native American narratives thus perform the significant function of communication not just through words, but through performing arts such as dancing, chanting, and storytelling. Native American scholars and writers today discuss the importance of performance aesthetics and their connection to history, culture, and politics.

Contemporary Native American writers therefore are left with the task of restructuring and correcting the false comprehensions of white ideals and stereotypes. Because a majority of the early life stories of Native people were solicited, collected, edited, and translated by Euro-American traders, missionaries, military officials, and travelers later followed by ethnologists and anthropologists, a significant collection of Native American self-narrations are collaboratively authored (Porter and Roemer 133). This has led scholars to conclude that one of the most dominant features of this period is characterized by 'bicultural composite composition', a collaboration of the narrator and recorder/editor (Krupat 5). Today, many Native Americans write for the benefit of Native American audiences, taking up the task of investigating Native American history, sociology, ethnography, culture, medicine, education, law, and literary criticism, among other fields. They have also expanded their purpose in writing, seeking to educate not just themselves, but the larger world about Native Americans.

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